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EXHIBIT

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# NCAA makes Canadian Hockey League players eligible for Div. I



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The NCAA Division I council voted Thursday to make Canadian Hockey League players eligible for NCAA Division I hockey in 2025, in a decision that could reshape the landscape of both college and major junior hockey.

The council ruled players can compete in the CHL -- comprising the Ontario Hockey League, Western Hockey League and Quebec Maritimes Junior Hockey League -- without jeopardizing their NCAA Division I hockey eligibility, provided they aren't "paid more than actual and necessary expenses as part of that participation."

The effective date of the rule change is Aug. 1, 2025. The new eligibility for CHL players does not apply to NCAA Division III; CHL players are still ineligible for NCAA Division III hockey.

The NCAA had previously deemed anyone who played in the CHL ineligible because there are players who have signed professional contracts with NHL teams playing in those leagues. CHL players are also paid a monthly stipend that's capped at \$250.

NCAA Bylaw 12.2.3.2 states that "an individual shall not be eligible for intercollegiate athletics in a sport if the individual ever competed on a professional team."

Despite the rule change, players who sign NHL contracts and return to the CHL are still not eligible to play NCAA Division I hockey. Players can however participate in NHL training camps, provided those teams don't compensate the player "beyond actual and necessary expenses."

The CHL supported the rule change in a statement released Thursday.

"While we will take time to fully review this rule change, we believe this is a positive development that will provide our players with more opportunities to continue their hockey and academic careers following their time in the CHL," the statement said. "It will also give young players and their families more options in choosing their development

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there is fear among some NCAA coaches that elite talents would opt not to play college hockey without having the current pressure point of losing eligibility if they chose Canadian major juniors instead.

"It has forced kids' hands at an early age to decide which path they want to take," WHL commissioner Dan Near told ESPN.

Former NHL stars such as Hockey Hall of Famer Paul Kariya and [Chicago Blackhawks](#) captain Jonathan Toews were Canadian-born players who chose to play in the NCAA. Since 2016, there have been 15 Canadians who played in college and were taken in the first round of the NHL draft. That list includes [Colorado Avalanche](#) superstar [Cale Makar](#) (UMass), [Buffalo Sabres](#) defenseman and 2021 No. 1 pick [Owen Power](#) (Michigan), and 2024 No. 1 pick [Macklin Celebrini](#) (Boston University), who was selected by the [San Jose Sharks](#).

The NCAA ruling alters its view of the CHL as a "professional" league, but under strict compensatory guidelines for players. The NCAA defines "necessary expenses" as ones "necessary or required for your participation in practice or competition, including but not limited to: meals, lodging, transportation, apparel, equipment, supplies, coaching, ice time, medical treatment (health insurance), and entry fees."

The rules include any team apparel the player might receive after being drafted in the CHL.

"To guarantee there is no issue with NCAA eligibility, an individual should return or pay for any celebratory item sent to them by a professional club who drafts the individual," the NCAA ruling states.

The change in policy between the NCAA and CHL has been anticipated among teams and coaches on both sides of the border -- especially after NCAA name, image, and likeness rules were loosened in 2021.

"Anyone who loves hockey and developmental leagues has been watching what's been happening in the NIL space and in the transfer portal space, trying to imagine if this will have implications on the future of how junior hockey players develop," Near said. "I think this could be the first domino to fall in that regard."

Supporters of changing the NCAA's CHL rules pointed to well-compensated athletes in other sports -- such as Olympic swimmers -- who had retained their NCAA eligibility. They also pointed out that some college hockey programs welcomed players who had played professional games overseas without the NCAA barring them from playing in college.

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and thus artificially suppresses compensation for players and artificially creates less competitive leagues," which it argued was "illegal under antitrust laws."

The proposed class action suit wasn't unexpected by the NCAA. In 2023, during a review of its policies, the NCAA determined there was a legal vulnerability in a potential "group boycott" by Canadian junior players. But the programs' coaches never took formal action to drop the rule before the suit was filed.

In September, Braxton Whitehead of the WHL's Regina Pats received a verbal commitment for the 2025-26 season from Arizona State University's Division I program -- the first NCAA commitment since a proposed class action suit was filed.

"[ASU's] slogan is 'Be the Tradition' and I think they love the idea of me being a trailblazer throughout all this and paving the way with NCAA and CHL relations," Whitehead told ESPN at the time. "I'm very hopeful that [the rules] will turn over before the 2025-26 season."

*ESPN's Ryan S. Clark contributed to this report.*